

Commissioner's Weekly Wrap Up

DCS Communications Office

April 1, 2005

The Week Ahead

Mon., April 4 – The Commissioner attends a “lard cake party” for the Southwest region in Jackson, Tenn. She then attends a “lard cake party” in Shelby County.

Wed., April 6 – The Commissioner attends the Tennessee Youth of the Year Celebration and Legislative Luncheon in Nashville.

Governor's Proclamation Recognizes Child Abuse Prevention Month

On Monday, March 28, Commissioner Viola P. Miller, along with DCS employees and representatives from Prevent Child Abuse Tennessee, attended an official proclamation ceremony with Governor Phil Bredesen, recognizing April as Child Abuse Prevention Month.

Bulletin Board

On Saturday, April 2, Prevent Child Abuse Tennessee invites you to come out for Hands On Nashville's “Pulse Day,” where teenagers will be making blue ribbons and tying them to trees in Nashville's Centennial Park in commemoration of Child Abuse Prevention Month. Ribbon-makers will be stationed in the park shelter nearest the children's garden, where others are welcomed to join in. The action starts at 9 a.m. and will continue until 1 p.m. For more information, call (615) 383-0994.

Vacancies with the Office of Child Permanency

The Office of Child Permanency has announced two vacancies for a Director of Foster Care and Adoption and a Director of Permanency Planning. To learn more about these positions, please visit the DCS Intranet at http://www.intranet.state.tn.us/chldserv/Employment_Opportunities/index.htm.

DCS Speak-Outs

The schedule for the remaining DCS Speak-Outs follows. If you did not receive an invitation, you may still attend, provided space is available. E-mail William Haynes, executive director of human resources, at William.Haynes@state.tn.us for more information.

- Monday, April 4, 10 a.m.-noon
University of Memphis, Memphis, Tenn.
University Center, Room 310
- Wednesday, April 6, 10 a.m.-noon
Southern Adventist University (Host), Chattanooga, Tenn.
Senior Neighbors of Chattanooga (Speak-Out location)
1000 Newby Street
- Wednesday, April 6, 2-4 p.m.
Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tenn.
Foundation Mansion
- Friday, April 8, 10 a.m.-noon
University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tenn.
Tennessee Auditorium, University Center
- Monday, April 11, 9-11 a.m.
Austin Peay State University, Clarksville, Tenn.
Clement Auditorium

Juvenile Justice – A Revised Focus

Submitted by Steven Hornsby, Deputy Commissioner of Juvenile Justice

Since my appointment last week as deputy commissioner of juvenile justice, I have been somewhat surprised by the number of comments I've received from JJ staff who have said that they have felt lost, abandoned, unappreciated, or all of the above. The time is now for a renewed focus on juvenile justice. I am excited and proud to be heading up this effort. I sincerely appreciate the support I've received from Commissioner Miller, Governor Bredesen, judges and so many others inside and outside of the department since my appointment. I will devote as much time as necessary to making this the absolute best – number one – outcomes- and performance-based JJ program in this country.

The Brian A. reforms have taken the spotlight for the past several years, which is a good and necessary thing for our children in foster care. However, it is probably a fair statement to say that, at least to a certain extent, this has been at the expense of the JJ

population. My initial, cursory – and I emphasize “cursory” – take is that we have lost valuable JJ placement resources over the last five or six years.

I am a proponent of a “blended” agency – one that treats all of the children who come into the state’s care, whether they are abused, dependent, neglected, unruly or delinquent. My experience on the bench taught me that so many times these kids had the same issues and same needs. My goal is to help move this department to a point where our delinquent kids get the proper therapeutic care and rehabilitation they are entitled to – every bit as much as our foster care kids.

My greatest immediate concern is community safety. As initial first steps to address this, we either have done or are beginning the following steps:

- No child adjudicated delinquent on a felony charge will be placed initially in a foster home or returned home.
- Delinquents who have been placed and subsequently absconded will be identified. We will then partner with law enforcement and the juvenile courts to get them picked up and back in custody.
- We need to develop a high quality assessment tool that evaluates the functional abilities of the child, the family and the risk to the community.
- We need to develop a greater provider network for children who are not appropriate for YDC placement, but who need a staff secure placement.

It is critically important that we begin addressing these concerns as soon as possible. To that end, we have created a “JJ Team Excellence”, which is composed of JJ professionals from across the state, as well as central office directors, plus some national experts. We will be meeting over the next several months to develop an action plan for developing and implementing performance- and outcome-based practices. I want everyone to be on-board with this initiative because it will truly be the vehicle that moves us forward.

I ask that all of you understand one clear, simple thing. We have only one goal, and that goal is that Tennessee will have the number one juvenile justice program in the United States of America.

Begin to accept and adopt this as your daily goal and wonderful things can happen.

Continuous Quality Improvement

Submitted by Bethany Womack, Children’s Services Program Coordinator, CQI

Once again, I’d like to share some of the ideas that have come out of the regional CQI meetings. The Southeast and East regional teams are coming up with great ideas to

improve performance by problem solving around the DCS outcomes. Some teams have already completed action steps and are on their way to meeting their first CQI team goal.

One team is looking at the number of children placed out of their home county. Last month, they collected information from all the agencies with the counties and locations of their available foster homes. This month, they are using that information to begin problem solving around out-of-county placements. Another team has set a goal of reducing overdue early periodic screening, diagnosis and treatment (EPSDT) appointments by 50 percent in the next two months. They have recently established a new system for communicating with agency case managers when children have EPSDT appointments due. This team is also planning to collaborate with a foster parent support team to assist in this effort and offer their input. A CPS team has set a goal of reducing their overdue cases. This team developed five action steps that they are using now to reduce the overdue cases.

CQI teams are also coming up with creative ways to facilitate performing their administrative tasks. One CPS group is in the process of putting together kits for case managers containing film, maps, contact information for area staff and all forms a worker might need when investigating a case. Another team has created a banner for the office with frequent contact information for agencies and emergency workers to save time in locating this information.

In addition to the Level I teams that have been meeting regularly since January, the Level II cluster meetings began in February. These teams are working on ideas that were “passed-up” from the Level I meetings. Team leaders in the Southeast are working on improving the ways DCS and the different county courts can coordinate to maximize the use of both DCS’ and the courts’ time and resources. The goal is to reduce time in care and prevent a case from being delayed by several weeks when continuances occur. In addition, one Level II team is working on processes to ensure adoption specialists are invited to child and family team meetings (CFTM) when a case has been identified for termination of parental rights (TPR) in efforts to reduce the time between TPR and adoption. Cluster teams in the area are also addressing ways to improve court and DCS collaboration, needed supplies, scheduling changes that might streamline work for frontline staff, and adoption contract issues, among others, that Level I teams have identified.

Transitioning with a Purpose

Submitted by Anidolee Melville-Chester, Director, Independent Living Program

The man without a purpose is like a ship without a rudder----a waif, a nothing, a no man. - Thomas Carlyle.

In the past 10 months of employment, I have heard that the department is undergoing great transition. Transition with a new Commissioner, management team, and the way we conduct business. We are moving away from a child-centered practice to a more

family-centered approach; wrapping services and resources around families to prevent children from coming into care has to be what we are about. I agree with all of these practices as a road map for successful outcomes for children.

As the director of independent living/transition to adulthood, I started thinking about purpose. What is my purpose for being with the Department of Children Services? What does it mean to be purposeful? How can I begin to define this for myself, and the staff that I supervise? How will this be reflected in service provision? Here is what I came up with: My purpose for being with the department is to minister to children and families that we serve, provide direction and support to the staff with which I am entrusted, and create a work culture that lends itself to productivity. Life is far greater than my own personal fulfillment, and focusing on myself will never be helpful in achieving life's purpose.

The answer was clear; the Office of Independent Living is transitioning with a purpose. Our purpose is to positively impact the lives of every child, ages 14-23, who we serve, in an empowering and meaningful way.

In order to achieve this purpose, I have asked the team that I work with what their purpose for being employed with the Department of Children Services is. Might I suggest that each of you reflect on that question along with us? If your answer comes back a job/paycheck, then you are only motivated twice a month, and the community of children that we serve will be shortchanged.

Knowing your purpose will give meaning and focus to your life, as well as to your work. It concentrates your effort and energy on what's important. Without a clear purpose, there is no foundation on which to base decision, allocate time and use resources. The choices and decisions you make will be based on circumstances, pressures and the mood we are in at the moment.

I count myself blessed to be a team member of the Office of Child and Family Well-Being. It has been a challenging, yet rewarding 10 months. The lists of our accomplishments are numerous – writing the five-year plan and receiving an increase in funding; enrolling 270 students in colleges and universities, training programs and vocational schools; updating and aligning policies to be consistent with federal requirements; conducting well over 1200 Daniel Memorial Assessments; attending statewide child and family team meetings; providing training on best practices, policies and documentation to field staff and managers; improving relationships with our regional administrators and private providers, and finally embarking upon the conversion of the University of Tennessee contract back to the department.

I am honored to say, I have two of the finest staff members: Karen Y. Coleman and Dave Shonts, who have been purpose-driven, dedicated, hard-working and supportive in assisting me with the monumental task of developing trusting relationships with our kids in care and positively impacting their lives in an empowering way.

As we continue our transitional journey as a department, it is my hope that we will realize that we individually and collectively make up the department. We are responsible for each success and connected to each failure. Nothing we can do will change the past; all we can do is learn from it, and let it go. Let's keep our focus on the idea that without purpose, life has no meaning, and without meaning, life has no significance or hope.

Bertrand Russell, an atheist suggests that, "Unless you assume a God, the question of life's purpose is meaningless".

Core Leadership

CORE Leadership Meeting Brenda Bell, Presiding March 22, 2005

Commissioner's Comments

The Commissioner stated that she was pleased with the preliminary Technical Assistance Committee (TAC) report. The TAC report acknowledged great progress on the protection from harm policies, quality assurance/continuous quality improvement and regional implementation plans. The TAC expressed concerns in serious incident reports, contract monitoring, recruitment and retention, and cultural competency under the workforce development section of the Path to Excellence.

The Commissioner explained that decision-making needs to be made at the regional level, and Central Office will be in the role of providing technical assistance to the regions. Now that we have regional implementation plans, Central Office needs to work with the regions. We need to get action steps for regional liaisons to move forward in helping regions implement their plans. Having a plan isn't enough. We have to see the plan implemented over time.

The Commissioner said that we need to make a commitment to work with universities on recruitment strategies. Retention is more problematic as evidenced by our current 22 percent turnover rate.

Contract Monitoring

The Commissioner stated we need a clear flow chart on how we collect, analyze and evaluate information from the contract monitor. The weakest link is the corrective action plans, due to lack of follow up on these plans. Program staff has to be in the loop to ensure that corrective action plans are being implemented.

The TAC is concerned about our work with private providers, but is supportive of cross-functional teams. A regional level of work needs to take place with OIG directors, drafting a plan to address contract monitoring with program input.

Announcements

Steve Hornsby was promoted to the Deputy Commissioner for Juvenile Justice.

Stacy Miller was promoted to General Counsel.

Steve Hovies is the Director for Diversity Initiatives.

Yolanda Moore is the new assistant for the legislative liaison.

Path to Excellence Domain Reports

William Haynes gave a handout on Domain II and discussed the accomplishments and areas to address. Accomplishments include the formation of the university consortium, salary improvement plan for direct services staff in phase two of implementation, DCS training plan developed and submitted to the TAC, stipend program in implementation and new training curriculum in its implementation stage. Areas to address include the employee satisfaction survey, employee speak-outs, the employee recognition system, and recruitment and retention plans.

In Domain VII, Ken Sanders said that accomplishments include an improved flex funds process, the completion of a private provider policy manual, needs assessment, the scheduling of a rural symposium in the spring and more. Issues to address include contracting with minority vendors, recruiting small businesses, clearly defining outcomes in performance-based contracting, revisiting timetable for PAR process and more.

Council on Accreditation (COA) Kick-off

The COA kick-off is scheduled for March 31. Leaders have been identified to study standards. 25 people from across the state have volunteered to be part of the core group. Tom Riche will take the lead on the G-standards. S-standards will be done region-by-region.

Regional Implementation Plans

All plans need to be given to TAC on March 31.

Regional Rightsizing

The regional rightsizing plan should be completed by the end of April



As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them. – John F. Kennedy

Never look down on anybody unless you are helping him up. – Rev. Jesse Jackson